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A SYMPOSIUM
ON REFORM IN GRAMMATICAL NOMENCLATURE IN THE STUDY OF
THE LANGUAGES¹
THE PRESENT SITUATION AND POSSIBLE REMEDIES

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I feel that I voice the sense of this meeting when I say that our thanks and the thanks of language teachers generally should go to Dr. Hale for an address such as he has just given us and for his previous work in the same direction. If careful and scholarly efforts of this sort, by men so thoroughly equipped as he, could have come earlier, the present chaos in our systems of nomenclature could scarcely have come upon us.

It is with much trepidation that I venture to address you at this point. This is particularly true since my whole point of view must of necessity be so utterly different from that of Dr. Hale. With points of view so different, our emphasis must come, of course, upon different phases of the problem; and our conclusions can therefore scarcely be expected to coincide, though most of our differences are in emphasis rather than in aim. Where there appear to be such differences of opinion, I desire to submit my views very humbly, with a full realization that they may be the immediate and narrow outlook of a private in the thick of a fight, rather than the broad and comprehensive understanding of the general, who, from a greater height, and with incomparably fuller information, views the battle in its larger and more permanent aspects. There is this to be said, however, for the view of the private: He has a close acquaintance, within the scope of his observation, with the actual facts and practical difficulties of the situation.

For eight years I have been teaching English grammar and reading in a state normal school to students who come from all sorts of schools. They have been studying grammar from twenty or thirty different texts. Here are some samples of questions that are asked of me during the first few weeks of a course: "Are the object complement and direct object the same? Well, at home we studied Baskerville and Sewell, and it says the direct object is not

¹Part of the program of the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club at Ann Arbor, Michigan, April 1, 1911. The first paper, on which the following discussions were based, was presented by Professor William Gardner Hale under the title, "The Harmonizing of Grammatical Nomenclature in High-School Study," and published in the *School Review* for June. A few copies of the Symposium will be available for distribution; those desiring a copy may address (inclosing a two-cent stamp) Mr. Louis P. Jocelyn, secretary of the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club, 541 South Division Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

a complement." Another says: "What? Not a complement! Why, Reed and Kellogg says that it is. And I know our teacher always just lit into us when we forgot to say object complement in a sentence like, *We saw John.*" Another voice: "Object complement! Why, in Carpenter we learned that the object complement was like *John* in this: *We named him John.* I know because I learned that sentence." Another: "Well, which is right?" "Well, I don't care. I'm all mixed up," says another; "I thought I knew something about grammar, but nothing I ever learned seems to be right."

This is not overdrawn. You may see just such a group as this gathered about my desk, many, many times a year. These young people are in earnest. They are trying to master the intricacies of a subject, abstruse and forbidding enough at best; and they find themselves balked and baffled at every turn by a shifting, uncertain, tricky terminology. Just when they begin to feel the satisfying grip of comprehension, the elusive concept slips out of its skin and leaves them grasping an empty name that means nothing.

What can we say for ourselves, we teachers of grammar? What excuse can we give if we allow this situation to exist one day longer than we must tolerate it? Here is a perfectly simple construction, almost the most simple and unmistakable in all language—the accusative after a transitive verb—and we haggle over what we should call it, and as a result we let our students and our young teachers go on with only imperfect notions, which we may be reasonably sure will be upset as soon as they enter upon the study of another text.

But grammar texts are comparatively well agreed on this construction. In the twenty-five different texts on my desk I find nine different names for the construction of *good* in *He is good*—the most simple, unmistakable, and fundamental predicate construction of the adjective; and eighteen different names for the construction of *red* in *We painted our barn red*.

Now I submit, as my thesis in this discussion, that where we have a simple conception, about which there is no real difference of opinion, we owe it to the science, to our students, and to our teachers, to have and use one name for that construction. When a student comprehends that relationship in an English sentence, learns its name, and gains the ability to recognize it when he meets it in literature or daily speech, he has an asset in knowledge and power that should have full value anywhere he has occasion to use that knowledge in the presence of other intelligent persons. I want that name to be fit and sensible, but still more I want it to be current coin in every English classroom. The fitness of a name lies not so much in its descriptive force as in the sureness with which it is understood by the user and the hearer. Further, when the student goes out to teach, and he finds that he must use new texts, I want him to be able to look in the index of a new book, find that term, turn to the appropriate page, and find this same concept discussed.

Further, when after much labor he learns in my class, say, the classification of verbs, and that only after much struggle and possibly some failures, and when he satisfies me at last that he does have the mastery over this classification, I want to feel that I may safely start him out to teach verbs to others; that although the order and arrangement may be different in the new texts he will use, yet the essential principles will be the same.

Now what *do* I know? I know that more or less ever since he has been in my class he has been having to unlearn many things that had been drilled into him by former teachers. I know that, in spite of all the assurances I have given him that these apparent differences are differences of name only, that the conceptions are the same, he has come to have a contempt for a science that is so slippery and unreliable, and a disbelief in many of the distinctions in grammar. I know that when he goes out to teach he will find a text which, if new to him, will not only take the subject up in a new order, but will have such an array of strange names and classifications that he will be utterly baffled and at sea. If he seeks to consult still another text his confusion will be worse confounded. Now what of his teaching? Where we should expect his power in grammar to translate itself into teaching power in literature, reading, and composition as well as in grammar itself; where we should expect clear-cut, pointed queries, in literature or reading, as to the construction of a word, phrase, or clause, and a corresponding illumination of the passage; where we should expect to find power in grammar exercising a potent influence over the sentence structure in his own composition and that of his classes: what do we find? We find him avoiding grammar where he can in his classes, and the class and himself in confusion when he does essay to use it. In the grammar class we find the work done with uncertainty and without enthusiasm.

This shifting, happy-go-lucky, each-man-for-himself terminology has vitiated not only our grammar-teaching but all our other English work. Suppose you ask a class the construction of *wonderful* in *How wonderful are thy works, O God!* You ought to be able, if your students know grammar and understand the passage, to get the answer at once, and to know that your student knows what he is talking about. Instead of that you will probably spend five minutes trying to find out whether he means the same thing by *subjective complement* that you do by *predicate adjective*.

But perhaps the most mischievous differences come in the naming of constructions about which there is some slight difference of opinion. I will cite three; namely, substantives ending in *ing*, infinitives preceded by the objective case, and conjunctive pronouns.

In *By being careful he was able to save money*, *being* is variously called verbal noun, nounal verb, participial noun, present participle, progressive participle, participle used as a noun, infinitive in *ing*, progressive infinitive, and gerund. Those of you who have taught grammar know that one

of the most elusive distinctions to be made is that between the adjective and the substantive in *ing*. I find it far easier to teach it to people who have never before studied it than to those who have studied it under different names.

With regard to infinitives preceded by substantives in the objective case, as *Let him go*—an exceedingly common construction in English—we have a wretchedly inadequate treatment in current texts. Some texts treat *let* as an auxiliary; while some say that *let* is the principal verb, and that *go*, with its subject *him*, is the object of *let*. We certainly cannot think of *go* as a finite verb with *him* as a subject, for *him* is plainly accusative. Further, if *let* is an auxiliary, *let go* must be the verb phrase. Then what sort of a phrase is this, what is its subject, and what is the construction of the accusative *him*? I repeat, this is one of the very commonest constructions in English, as witness: *Let's go*; *I want him to come*; *See them run*; *Have him come*; *Make him go*—constructions on our lips in almost a fourth of the sentences we utter in common speech, yet without adequate and accepted treatment in our current texts. You can see that you and I should have no inconsiderable difficulty in understanding each other in discussing these constructions. Are we to treat them all alike, as does Mead's text, saying that the infinitive, with its subject, is the object of the verb; or are we to look for different modal meanings in the infinitives? The subject itself is not inherently complex. But the lack of an accepted terminology in dealing with the conceptions involved makes it very elusive.

In the matter of conjunctive pronouns we have, I feel, absolute error. Most of the old standard texts are in the procession; no doubt they have been the bellwethers for many other textbook writers. In *I know what you are reading*, very many texts say *what* is equivalent to *that which*. Thus, *I know what you are reading* is said to be equivalent to *I know that which you are reading*. Let us see. Suppose I see you deeply engrossed in reading a Spanish novel. I say I know what you are reading. Now what is it that I know? Obviously it is the idea expressed by the clause *what you are reading*, *you are reading what*, or, if we substitute the noun for *what*, *I know you are reading a Spanish novel*. I do not know *that which you are reading*. I do not know Spanish at all, and I do not know the novel. I do not know the thing at all. All I do know is that you are reading a Spanish novel.

I cannot refrain from saying a few things about the subjunctive mood at this point, though Dr. Hale would seem to have covered that field pretty thoroughly. Just what do we mean by the subjunctive mood? Do we mean a certain "mood," or a state of mind, in which an assertion is made? Or do we mean an "inflection" to show this state of mind? If the latter, I can see why we may inquire whether the subjunctive mood is disappearing from English; if the former, then what does our discussion imply? Do we mean that we who use English have less occasion to "suppose" or "wish" things

that are contrary to fact than do the users of other languages? Impossible, certainly. Yet at other times we do speak of the subjunctive mood precisely as though it were a state of mind, and not an inflection, that we are talking about. I believe that the first thing for us to do is to determine just what we mean by the term "subjunctive mood."

Assuming that in this discussion we mean the inflection, let me suggest one or two things that seem to me important. In English this mood takes various forms. Aside from the absence of the ending *s* in the third person singular, and the use of "be" and the plural form "were," we should note the peculiar tense-shifting that accompanies this mood. Not seeing any treatment of this in my texts, I was teaching it independently, when my attention was called to the fact that two or three texts do discuss it. It really makes about the most interesting phase of the study in English. Thus in *Were he honest he would confess, were*, while past in form, is present in meaning. Hence, even with a plural subject, where the number inflection would disappear, the tense peculiarity would still signify to the reader or hearer that the supposition is contrary to fact. Likewise in *Had he been honest he would have confessed, had been*, while past perfect in form, is really simple past tense in meaning; there is, in fact, no inflection whatever except this peculiar tense-shifting, in this type of subjunctive, and yet we have no difficulty in sensing the negation of the assertion.

Further, there can be no doubt that the inverted order in the above sentences helps distinctly in showing that the supposition is contrary to fact. Mere emphasis frequently distinguishes between fact and contingency. Note the difference between the verbs *is* in *If he is coming, I am not going to run* and *If he is coming, I am going to run*: a fact implied in the first, mere contingency in the second.

These problems run all through this mood in English, affecting it so strongly that it cannot be considered apart from them. It is my opinion that this truth will make it possible to treat this mood in English parallel with the same mood in other languages, only along broad lines. Detailed agreement cannot be expected. English texts themselves are in hopeless confusion.

So much for the present situation: a chaos of misunderstanding; a tangle of overlapping conceptions; efforts of teacher and pupil, honest and deserving though these efforts may be, going to waste; grammar a discredited study when it should be a helpmeet and handmaid to all English work. Dr. Hale says of the matter: "It is perplexing." I am not satisfied with his adjective. I should say: "It is unendurable."

What of the outlook for the future? Over two years ago, the writer began an agitation in his own state, in which he was ably helped by the *Western Teacher*, to interest Wisconsin teachers in the matter of a uniform nomenclature. Last fall the Wisconsin State Teachers' Association passed resolutions asking the National Education Association to appoint a committee

whose office it should be to go over the whole matter of grammatical nomenclature and recommend a system of nomenclature for use in our grammar texts. This report, if adopted, was to be recommended to publishers for incorporation in their texts.

The writer then began a correspondence with school men all over the country, addressing hundreds of city, state, and county superintendents, heads of normal schools, and others. Several state associations, including those of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Washington, Montana, Illinois, and Indiana, endorsed the plan. Something like three hundred prominent school men, most of them city superintendents and heads of normal schools, have personally favored it. As you doubtless know, the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association at the Mobile meeting created a committee in accordance with the terms of the resolution. The other members of that committee are Superintendent Ella Flagg Young, of Chicago, Assistant Superintendent Henry S. West, of Baltimore, Superintendent Stratton D. Brooks, of Boston, and Professor William Gardner Hale, of Chicago. As chairman of that committee, I feel that it would be unseemly in me to make specific statements as to my attitude in individual matters of nomenclature, particularly since the committee has not yet held a meeting. I may, however, state some of the principles which will guide me so far as I am personally concerned.

1. We must consider the practical side. The publishers have so far shown a very commendable and unselfish spirit of willingness to co-operate with the teachers in the matter. We must not abuse that spirit by too radical and sweeping changes, else the publishers and authors might suffer revulsion of feeling and refuse to come with us. That would mean the breaking down of the whole plan. Anyhow, the equity of the case, as well as common sense, requires that no sweeping change be made unless logic inexorably demands it.

2. English grammar must concern itself with the phenomena of the English sentence. It is a grammar of *function* and not of *form*. It is not wise to try to strain matters in order to make a nomenclature of an inflected tongue fit the grammar of our uninflected tongue. Where we are dealing with simple, basic functions, in which we may observe corresponding and coinciding phenomena, as in the predicate adjective, etc., or in an actual and clear coincidence of mood, I favor parallel use of terms. But we must remember that language is the master, grammar merely the servant; and the servant must suit its convenience to the master.

Further, nothing is to be gained for the teacher of other languages by attempting an unnatural and forced coincidence of nomenclature where there is no coincidence of phenomena back of it. The best assurance that English grammar is to be an ally in the study of another tongue will be an understanding of English grammar itself. This leads me to remark, by the way,

that the final report of the British Joint Committee which has been at work on this matter contains a specific recommendation to the effect that the five cases of Latin be recognized in English. I will say that I cannot see my way clear to endorse that, for the reasons I have just given; but most of the recommendations of the Joint Committee will be great aids to our committee in its work.

Still further, on this second point, we must remember that the proportion of our students of English grammar who take up other languages is very small. Fairness to the many who never have occasion, unhappily, to compare the word-relationships in different tongues demands that we give these many children first consideration in the premises. Certainly it would be wrong to sacrifice their interests in any wise to bring about a doubtful good to their few more fortunate fellows.

3. A large part of the work of the committee will be the clearing up of conceptions, the formulation of accurate definitions, and the organization of subject-matter. If this work can be done well, and if authors and teachers will accept it, it should go far toward accomplishing the end of the whole matter, for much of the present confusion has arisen from the fact that the subject-matter was being attacked from so many different angles.

4. The committee will welcome suggestions from all who care to make them. It particularly desires to co-operate with other committees who are working on the same problem.

5. It is my conviction that our first step toward a better state of things must come with practical uniformity of nomenclature for accepted and fundamental constructions in English grammar, and that therefore this committee should not wait longer, but should, as its commission specifies, recommend a system of nomenclature in February, 1912. What will be accomplished by waiting? We have the full report of the British Joint Committee; we should never be able, no matter how long we waited or how arduously we labored, to satisfy any one of us fully. Meanwhile we should be withholding from our students and teachers of grammar the thing they most need: a current, standard-value coin of nomenclature. As individual authors feel, in the future, that they can improve this nomenclature, there should be some standing committee, large in number and representative in personnel, to which such recommendations for changes might be referred before being thrust upon the public schools. Such a committee would, of course, have advisory, not mandatory, powers. But its censorship should keep some of the unworthy and confusing innovations out of our schools.

6. In all our labor we must remember that we are working, not for ourselves, not for scholars, not for the delectation of savants, but for the salvation of the useful study of English grammar by grade and high-school students and teachers, and for the ready grasp and sound understanding of that subject.